

# The Second Vietnam Veterans Appreciation Dinner Organized by the American Vietnamese War Memorial Alliance

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*Translated by Quynh Tram from a News Article of Nguoi Viet Ngay Nay's (The Vietnamese Today's) Editor, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014*

Auburn – On Saturday August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014, many Vietnamese veterans of Republic of Vietnam (RVN) and U.S. Vietnam War veterans together with their families attended “The Second Vietnam Veterans Appreciation Dinner” hosted by the American Vietnamese War Memorial Alliance at The Holy Family Parish Hall at 505 17<sup>th</sup> Street SE in Auburn.

In addition to the RVN and U.S. veterans, several civic leaders such as former Auburn Mayor Peter Lewis, Director of the Washington department Veterans Affairs Alfie Alvarado, Deputy Mayor of Auburn Richard Wagner, and especially a representative group from Vancouver B.C. led by Vietnamese Military writer Hai Trieu, also appeared at the event.

According to Mrs. Lan Phan Jones, Co-President of The American Vietnamese War Memorial Alliance, and organizer of the dinner, the purpose of this dinner was to create opportunity for expressing gratitude to Vietnam war veterans (American and South Vietnamese)—who had fought in the Vietnam War to serve and protect freedom of South Vietnam before April 1975. Moreover, this annual summer event aims to foster a collaborative tradition within the community.

After national anthems of both countries were played during the two-flag salutation ceremony, the attendees enjoyed the dinner while listening to stories told by the Vietnam War veterans. The RVNs re-counted their experiences of many post-war years of torture and hardship in the communist’s prisons (concentration camps), and of their resettled lives in the United States. US Vietnam War veterans in return recalled their experiences hand in hand with their allies while serving in South Vietnam. There were many emotional stories but none as poignant as of Dave Schmidt’s who served in Vietnam as a Marine. Mr. Schmidt was choked up uttering that the U.S. government and many Americans have expressed thankfulness toward veterans of all other US wars, but none for Vietnam War veterans. So he was very heartened to be invited to attend the dinner hosted by the Alliance and South Vietnamese friends—who, although being betrayed by the U.S., still remember and acknowledge the sacrifice of more than 58,000 American soldiers who died and other soldiers who valiantly fought hand-in-hand for freedom and integrity of South Vietnam. Even though the event was regarded as a dinner but everyone was so absorbed to the storytelling part to the point that so much food became the leftovers to bring home. The event lasted until almost 10 p.m. and ended with the attendants’ lingering emotions with a promise for the next year’s reunion.

Reporting about this appreciation dinner event, we do not forget Vietnamese veteran Thai Phan—who had shouldered many tasks of organizing for the two annual events as well as planning to build the memorial since the beginning. Mr. Phan was indeed the one who informed us about this year’s event. Hence, we were able to arrange time to attend the appreciation dinner. When entering the room and no longer seeing Thai at the greeting table to welcome guests as usual, we felt saddened. On Thai’s funeral, we couldn’t come to say goodbye. Although it’s late, we express our prayers for Mr. Phan’s enlightenment.